THE MANIPULATION THROUGH MEDIA, FROM CONCEPT TO PRACTICAL APPLICATION

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Abstract

The current article highlights the way in which a precarious cultural level of journalists - especially from television - can have serious social and political consequences. The text speaks about the cultural media sphere and the shortcomings that make the manipulation possible, such as: education deficiencies in the spiritual area of beliefs, religions, confessions, obvious shortcomings in a European Union that has refused to recognize its Judeo-Christian roots in its Constitution. In the context of ignorance and lack of knowledge of some basic elements of our history, the unprepared and poorly educated public opinion can easily be manipulated. It is clear, therefore, that lack of cultural knowledge can lead to serious media communication errors that can lead to further manipulation. The text includes media cases from the so sensitive sphere of spiritual life, where both politicians and journalists, but also the general public, more often than not, have questionable knowledge. Area, where, the general culture, but also the nuances, are compulsory, but also responsible for the long-standing beliefs of the public.

Keywords: *cultural manipulation, media, freedom of expression, cultural criterion, symbolic transfer.*

1. MANIPULATION – CONCEPTUAL CONSIDERATIONS

The manipulation is the act of influencing the public opinion through specific means, and the result is that the manipulated persons have the impression that they act according to their own ideas and interests, but in fact, they take up an idea, an opinion, an argument or an evaluation that does not belong to them, opinion induced through various means of manipulation. Among these techniques for manipulation we can identify: the rumor, the misinformation, the intoxication and the propaganda.

The first one, the *rumor*, being also defined as a statement that is presented as true, without the possibility of checking its correctness one way or the other, is released because it has a double function, that of explaining but also of alleviating the emotional tensions created by its being spread. The spread of rumors depends on the social institutions, the social contexts, the organizational and broadcasting system of the formal information, the personality traits of the individuals who create and spread the rumor.

Usually, rumors tend to adjust according to individual interests, and not only, but also to personal prejudices or social affiliations of the person who spreads them.

Depending on the correlation between the rumors and the form, the quality, the quantity, and the credibility of the official or formal information, they are widely spread and sometimes are launched by the totalitarian state through means of propaganda precisely to promote behaviors and attitudes that would be difficult to foment by using formal means. The fact is that their spreading about and around can be restricted because is practically impossible to quickly confirm the veracity of an information. The rumor can be introduced through the use of misinformation by social groups, but also by individuals, usually leaders, who can influence their group's decision-making (DEFLEUR & BALL, 1999).

The *misinformation* can be performed by an institution or organization and it represents the deliberate change of the conveyed messages, namely, the intervention on the elements from which a communication process is formed, in order to determine the receptors - the targets of the message - to respond in certain way in terms of attitudes and actions.

As for the dimensions of misinformation, we can clearly identify an intentional one (with

symbolic forms encoding information in the message through natural or non-verbal language - gestures, concrete symbols - colors, panels, and abstract symbols - logical expressions, mathematical formulas) and the other non-intentional, both of them focusing on a particular segment of opinion.

What differentiate the misinformation from other types of communication is the deliberate nature of the action and the release of partially true information in the information circuit along with false statements without indicating the verifiable source for the authenticity of the issued information. Thus, the most effective results in this regard are in the mass media, where the misinformation directly reaches all the opinion segments of the social arena.

The third manipulation technique is the *intoxication* that, in Robert Dehin's *Dicționarul tratamentelor naturiste* (*Dictionary of Natural Treatments*) appears with the meaning of "poisoning"; insidious action that tends to create certain opinions, demoralize, confuse (DEHIN, 2004). In other words, the intoxication, seen as semantic neologism, is synonymous with diplomatic subterfuge, with diversion, war strategy, betrayal, lies, internal and external politics, and other tricks used particularly to implement certain higher military plans.

The poisoning in particular is aimed at the opponent and consists in providing him with wrong information, in order to make him take "beneficial" decisions for himself, and obviously favorable to you; it is usually enforced by the military, political parties, banks, various manufacturers, but in order to influence, not a collectivity, but one or more individuals.

The last, form of manipulation, the *propaganda*, is a systematic tendency to transmit, promote and spread some doctrines, theses and ideas of certain social groups, in order to influence and form particular different opinions and convictions.

By referring to the profile of the social group that initiates it, the propaganda can be economic, medical, technical, sports, cultural, etc., and clearly pursues the achievement of some goals of conviction.

Distinction can be made between the tactical and the strategic propaganda, the first being employed on the short term in order to achieve immediate effects, and second one, in the long run, with the goal of changing the attitudes, values, but also of the conceptions of individuals and society.

Initiated by a specialized institutional structure, in particular, such as cultural, study, design, organizational, programming and implementation centers, the propaganda has ideologies and values that are in direct correspondence with the interests and objectives of the group that it represents, the means and methods of transmission of propaganda being: affective methods, in order to provoke collective emotional experiences and endorsements; methods of concrete facts with relevant details in order to change the opinions of its subjects; and persuasive methods, mostly used in speech rhetoric, by using emotionally saturated words. The difference between the tactical propaganda and the strategic propaganda is that the first one is designed on the short term to achieve immediate effects, and the latter is initiated on a long-term basis for the individual membres of society to change basic attitudes, values and concepts (DOBRESCU & BARGAOANU, 2002).

2. MANIPULATION – PRACTICAL EMPHASIS

If we were to refer back to the definition of manipulation in the *Noul dicționar universal al limbii române / New Universal Dictionary of the Romanian Language* - namely, "influencing the choice of behavior of a person or a collectivity through various (reprovable) tactics in order to achieve a goal" - it is certain that the public environment where the phenomenon is manifested in its full, is that of the written and audiovisual media. As far as we are concerned, we want to focus here on the cultural media sphere and on the shortcomings that make manipulation possible. We can identify education deficiencies, especially in the spiritual area of beliefs, religions, and confessions. It will immediately be said that the occurrence is natural, given that in this area the totalitarian period has left indelible marks, but it must be shortly added that the situation is also found in

the Western democratic media, the lack of religious culture being obvious in an European Union that refused to recognize in its Constitution its Judeo-Christian roots.

The most notable case, in this context, seems to me to have been the one that twice played havoc - once in Denmark in 2005, the second time in France in 2015 - that of the Prophet Muhammad's representation. It was a sad occasion in which the lack of culture of the Western journalists - ignorant of Islamic civilization -, as well as the unconscious absolutization of the freedom of expression, met the criminal intransigence of certain Muslim extremists, the conflict culminating in the loss of human lives (POPESCU, 1999).

Even if, in our geographical area, the manipulation did not manage to reach such serious consequences, the lack of culture and of historical logic repeatedly allowed for journalistic statements and the occasional political statement brimming with ignorance, culminating with the superficial and half-learned exclamation - "it would have been better if the Romanians were Catholic and not Orthodox"! The lack of knowledge in terms of basic elements of our history, ignoring the conditions of Romanian ethnogenesis, of its Southeast European context, the lack of awareness in terms of Orthodox values and the fundamental differences between the two great denominations of Christianity make possible such assertions which, in a certain context -, for example that of the Pope visiting Romania - can become general points of view of an unprepared public opinion overtly manipulated.

I add, in the same line of thought that, immediately after the Revolution, the lack of knowledge of the fundamental differences of canon law between the Eastern Cesaro-Papism and the Western Papo-Cesarism made possible in the media, but also in the political sphere, the hurried assertion of the so-called "collaborationism" of the high Orthodox Clergy with the communist political power, somehow contravening an anti-communist resistance, of the Catholic Clergy. From there, there was only one step - with serious political implications - towards the assertion of Romania's possible membership to the Visegrad group in the 1990s; a group where Romania was politely

but naturally turned down; the cultural, social and economic differences between our Orthodox space and the Protestant and the Catholic ones of Central Europe, being ignored by politicians under the influence of foreign prime ministers offices and improvised journalists.

In the same horizon of "if history", a few years ago, there appeared in the media - taken over uncritically from some rash historians – the unfounded and undocumented assertion of the Cuman Turanic (moreover Catholic too) character of the first Romanian voivodes.

The cultural manipulation, following immediately the communist propaganda that they noisily wanted to break away from (it was done by the same journalists), led after the events of 1989 to the absurd statement that here there was a "Siberia of the spirit", even if some celebrities of the culture of the communist era - a culture that had its undeniable values - became anti-communist voices on TV screens.

Another manipulation due to ignorance and which has become a dominant in the media for almost a decade was that the interwar period - of great cultural efflux, of economic blossom, but also of terrible political crimes - could be proclaimed as a paradise worthy of imitation.

A general drawback of the public culture in Romania is ignoring a science that has been abolished for years in our university education: I am talking about geopolitics. Eliminated from the university curriculum after 1945, both in the Western universities (the United States and Western Europe) and the East too (the Soviet Union and the socialist countries) for the absurd reason that it was a science born and developed in the Germany of the Third Reich (but unrelated to Nazism), geopolitics was gradually assimilated, after 1990, by the political forces and academia everywhere. But, assimilated with serious shortcomings, partially explainable. We have already referred to the presentation of Romania, a Southeast European country, as a central European country, not belonging to the area where Hungary, Slovakia, the Czech Republic and Poland were to be found. I will add that the media often speaks of Romania as a Balkan country, an obvious geopolitical error; Romania is a Southeastern European country, European Southeast that is part of the continent composed

of Balkans- the area between the Danube and Cape Matapan - and the Carpatho-Danubian-Pontic area comprising Romania and the Republic of Moldova (FICEAC, 2001).

The geopolitical deficiency is, as a matter of fact, specific to the international media and I want to remind in this respect the strange and quickly abandoned formula of the 90's, from the American media, taken over by us, of a bizarre "North Central Europe" that ran from the Baltic area to Bucharest and to a "South Central Europe" that ranged from Romania to the Aegean Sea. It is clear, therefore, that the lack of cultural preparation can lead to serious media communication errors that can further lead to manipulation.

I have chosen for this article media cases from the so sensitive sphere of spiritual life where both politicians and journalists, but also the general public, more often than not, have questionable knowledge. Area, where, the general culture, but also the nuances, are compulsory, but also responsible for the long-standing beliefs of the public. The cultural manipulation is dangerous because it "nails" definitions that concern an entire community, an entire people for a long, long time.

In a book written by a journalist who is also a PhD neurobiologist - I'm talking about Sebastien Bohler -, there are taken into discussion the experiments that make media manipulation understood (BOHLER, 2009) through the psychology of the mass-media consumer. From the very beginning, it is stated: "Our behavior in front of television, radio, or written media is largely subjected to certain unconscious mechanisms. The mere fact of eating chips while looking at a horror film takes place because our brain associate fear with the need for fat .... "

Bohler lays out numerous experiments to explain the methods of written or audiovisual media, "in order to influence our tastes, preferences, hatred and envy, ways of mass manipulation available to anyone (BOHLER, 2009)". The research of the French specialist explains in scientific terms how man receives the information and what are the sources of a gullibility that is often due only to the rapid scroll of news flow. The book recounts many examples of psychological experiments related to audio-visual practices, but the conclusions are

particularly relevant. Here is one of them: "The largest consumers of information often develop an exaggerated perception of the real level of violence in society, of the number of crimes, of thefts, of aggressions and rapes." There are given examples of this kind during a presidential campaign in France (BOHLER, 2009), but the idea can be applied at any time to other countries and situations. In Romania, for example, two or three minor aggressions against the members of the opposition turned into an apocalyptic image picked up by the international media; or to take an even more recent example, the discovery of a fake physician has created an entire daily psychosis, the media bringing up similar examples.

Examples of manipulation can also be taken from journalistic pursuit of various diseases caused by a particular product, a certain water, a certain variety of meat, etc. and in this case, "the reactions of the public are dictated directly by the emotional tone used by the mass- media. A passionate phraseology often has a profound impact on opinions and behaviors, even if it does not convey true information. On the contrary, official news that contains the necessary, precise information is less likely to raise large popular movements." (BOHLER, 2009) (the case of avian influenza, the mad cow disease, the Apa Nova case). Moreover, there are situations of great gravity where the manipulation was essential. It is the case of terrorism during the Romanian Revolution. In discussing the political manipulation, this issue has been raised (GAVRILUȚĂ, 2015) by several authors; we will not dwell on it, but we remind you that any abnormal situation in the days of the Revolution was attributed to terrorists - if need be, arrived from countries of the Middle East -, the same way of thinking being found in the West after the September 11, 2001 attacks.

Political psychology studies explain what the "simple exposure effect" is, more precisely, why a omnipresent political personality in the media has an increased popularity, (BOHLER, 2009) as there are situations where the lack of a certain activity makes a political character rise in polls – polls that represent a particular form of manipulation: "The effect of the polls lies in their publication. They are the ones that, regularly broadcasted by the media, create a fragile majority

trend. It is obvious that the majority of respondents answers being already aware of the polls results published every week (BOHLER, 2009).

A special chapter presents media advertising: "Advertising on TV ... is ... the art of permeating the human brain so that information can be imprinted as efficiently as possible" (BOHLER, 2009). Clearly, the ad targets the viewer's unconsciousness, the advertising's force being impetuous. We eat such a product, we anarchically take such medication because they are often presented on the small screen or because a star tells us how he or she uses them (it has become a supremely ridiculous fact that in the past months a television presentation is telling us 10 times a day which product must be used to avoid baldness). Subliminal links are made between a 4x4 vehicle and a certain male type, between a perfume or a feline fur and a woman brimming with sexuality, these primitive forms of advertising resorting to elementary physiological stimuli.

Walter Lippmann analyzed the discrepancy between the world and the "realities" we perceive and on the basis of which we act. Most of what we know about the environment in which we live, he said, comes indirectly to us, although "anything we believe that it is a true image we treat as if it were part of the environment itself." It is about the informational manipulation through the media structure, and what Lippmann observes is that "the only perception one can have of an event which he has not yet experienced is the one created by his mental image of such event." So the writer reminds us that, at times, we react to fictions as hard as we do to realities. The fictions are not lies, but rather the image that we ourselves manufacture when reacting to a representation of an environment. The role of the media intervenes in reconstructing the simplified pattern of reality, in manipulating the thought and action of the masses of people. Based on the media's representations of the world, man thinks, works, and acts accordingly (CUILENBURG et al., 2000).

On the other hand, Ignacio Ramonet reminds us about the subtle manipulation of mentalities at planetary level. He draws attention to the modern communicative mechanism that is accompanied by a return of the monopolies. Regarding the means of disseminating information, the citizen is in the midst of skepticism, of fears, of mistrust - dominant feelings lately. So, each of us seems to feel that something is going wrong in the general operation of the information system. Just some of this skeptical information would be the examples of the Romanian Revolution, the Gulf War, or the Clinton-Lewinsky scandal. As Ramonet also said, the basic concepts of journalism have changed, because the reporting to the representational approach of media can only be crisis triggering.

Gaston Bachelard, an important anthropologist and interpreter of symbols, sees in the picture and in the idea two opposing poles of the psychic activity. Thus, as he himself says, the image fails to form conceptual thinking. The image manipulation is considered to be a phenomenon of cultural regression, and as an example, we have the comic books that are accused of making the young people lose their taste for reading real book.s

Roberto Cisimo studied the "press as part of the most active manipulation systems of public opinion" and, starting from the premise that "the mass-media contributes not only to the genesis but also to the manipulation of the public opinion", concludes that it is a terrible weapon in terms of influence potential.

Vladimir Volkoff clarifies that the error is defined as an inadequacy in relation to reality, while the lie is an inadequacy of the truth. The person who misinforms aims to manipulate, using both the lie and the slander when they prove useful to his interests.

H. P. Cathala talked about the lies in literature: the wise amounting of half truths, with half lies, the absolute lie, the **countertruth**, the lying through omission, the exploitation of details, the mixing of facts, opinions or equivalent facts, false reminiscences or unjustified comparisons, the lie sunk in a clutter of information, approximate or truncated quotes, statements made in an angelic, indolent or indignant tone, the apocalyptic exaggeration of an accessory and irrelevant fact, the weakening of the truth through a sarcastic presentation, the labeling of the interlocutor. Cathala even reminded that the superior form of the manipulative use of lies remains, however, the proclamation of truth by letting it be understood that it is a lie, and the denial of an

affirmation so that the interlocutor may believe that it is approved by the one who formulates and emits it (CATHALA, 2004).

3. CONCLUSIONS

Even though it has been practiced for centuries, the persuasion or science of conviction, as a form of manipulation, is considered to be the product of the twentieth century. So, as the persuasive techniques evolve from art to science, their effectiveness on human behavior will increase over time. Among the most important studies on manipulation through communication, we mention those of some authors such as: W. J. McGuire, E. Collins, B. H. Raven, W. Weiss.

At the same time, although there are many definitions of manipulation, they present common points, such as: the purpose of successful manipulation is to alter the attitudes, the opinions or the behaviors of the manipulated, in the sense estimated by the manipulator; the manipulation occurs through a process of communication; in the manipulation process physical constraint methods are not used, only mental ones, as it is being defined as symbolic violence; during the manipulation process feelings are called upon; the imprint of manipulation can be a negative one, because the purpose of manipulation is to serve the interests of the manipulated one; one of the conditions of manipulation is the existence of at least two actors - the manipulator and the manipulated. The variety of methods and the evolution of manipulation through the press reveals that the manipulation is such an act, succeeding in acting upon those who let themselves pray to it, without even realizing.

In conclusion, we can say that the bombing, and implicitly the manipulation of the citizen with various press information in a larger quantity than he can store, reduces the public's critical spirit and, moreover, generates effects of "sedation". However, let us not forget that the new theories on media manipulation techniques bring the refinement of the supply of psychological actions in a new light. It seems that slowly, it is a "new world order" imposed by the media, which leaves aside George Orwell's 1984 theory. So, as James Humphreys - the great political communications professor at Kingston University in the UK - says, the "fashion" of press manipulation is overtaken, the place being taken over by the Internet, which obviously becomes the greatest means of information and communication.

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